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Finally. Buff is back. After a couple weeks vacationing with the family, Buff is back in the fold and so is The B-List. His first game back? An Indians victory over the sensational Francisco Liriano and the red hot Twins. I've said it before, I'll say it again. No better daily Indians column exists. In print or cyberspace. Welcome back Buff.



Baseball is a funny game: facing Francisco Liriano, Cliff Lee started as sharp as a balloon, our #3 hitter was about as bad as possible, Kyle Lohse didn't suck for two whole innings ... and the Indians still won.

1) My Favorite Player is better than Francisco Liriano!

Again, it's an empirical question. Scoreboard!

Okay, that's not true. Liriano was described as "wild," and he certainly did scatter the ball a bit, throwing 57 strikes in 97 pitches and walking three.

Cliff Lee threw 60 strikes in 97 pitches and walked three. Obviously, they were three crucial strikes.

On the other hand, Lee also carried a no-hitter into the fifth, struck out 5 in the first four frames, and only walked one batter after walking the first two. Whatever Carl Willis said to him on the mound was obviously very effective. Sure, it helps that the Twins collectively hit a bit like they have Chico's Bail Bonds on the backs of their jerseys, but it's a nice outing ... until he turned into a banana in the sixth. Four hits, including two doubles (and two infield singles, which drive me crazy), and a comical error by Lee himself was enough to ensure that Cliffy didn't finish the sixth inning.

2) Your defense, you may leave it at home, you require it not

The Twins generally play pretty good defense, but there's precious little even the best defense can do about the way the Indians scored five of their six runs. The Tribe pounded out four home runs: the obligatory shot from Travis Hafner (off a lefty, ho hum), the welcome back shot by Casey Blake, the power resurgence of Jhonny Peralta (hey, a guy can dream, can't he?), and the obligatory WTF shot from Kelly Leak^H^H^H Shoppach to give Really Big Bob a two-run cushion instead of just one. Believe it or not, although that doubled the margin, it increased my confidence about a hundredfold.

3) Welcome back, slugger!

Casey Blake has either healed or does not require an oblique muscle to hit a ball a very, very long way. That was some shot.

How happy am I to have Blake back in the lineup? About as happy as I would have been flabbered this time last season if you told me I'd be happy Casey Blake was back in the lineup.

4) Welcome back, not slugger!

Jason Michaels has either healed or does not require a hamstring to flail uselessly at the plate. Hey, he had a walk and a sac fly. It keeps

Todd Hollandsworth glued to the bench: how can that be a bad thing?

Note: yes, I understand that Hollandsworth has been hitting. I believe I saw a stat that said he is hitting like .384 in a recent dreadfully-small sample size. This is one of the things that makes baseball such an interesting game: given a selective-enough sample, it can make Todd Hollandsworth look like a major-league baseball player. The only problem with him on the bench is that he is less attractive to be traded, which represents the sum total of his value. Of course, having him (as a lefty with large platoon splits) facing Frank Liriano is probably not the best way to boost his trade value, either.

In any event, go Jason!

5) Like Colonel Flagg, I am the wind

Grady Sizemore stole his 14th base, which is not only very nice, but especially good coming off a lefty. Sure, it was a 3-2 count and Liriano was concentrating way way way way more about actually throwing a damned strike than Grady, but it's nice nonetheless.

6) General Managing Head Scratchers

Blake comes up, so Franklin Gutierrez goes down. Now, I have been skeptical about Gutierrez' ability to hit at the major-league level.

Searching the archives may find one or two mentions, possibly sarcastic, of Frank's prowess at the plate. Okay, every day for a month. But the man was actually starting to hit, and although the same sample-size warnings of Hollandsworth apply, Gutierrez is young enough and has little enough exposure to major-league pitching that one could be reasonably hopeful about Actual Development. (Todd's had his time, plus three, carry the nine.)

Yes, it makes sense that if you call up Blake you send down an outfielder. And Gutierrez certainly is best-served by playing every day. The move is perfectly defensible. But does this team really need BOTH Joe Inglett AND Ramon Vazquez? Since it doesn't need Ramon

Vazquez, it can't possibly need both Ramon Vazquez and Anything Else, unless the Anything Else is One Billion Dollars or A Debilitating But Not Serious Illness To Ramon Vazquez.

I could be wrong. (*)

7) The triumphant return of Gil Mota

What, you mean you're not impressed by an inning of work including a hit, a walk, a run, and roughly equal numbers of strikes and balls (13:12)? What makes you think that isn't the real Gil Mota?

By the way, the man he walked is hitting .213. The run-scoring double was provided by a man whose OBP is higher than his SLG. That's ... suboptimal.

8) The less-triumphant return of Ron Belliard

0-for-4 is not a good day at the plate. 0-for-4 with 2 Ks is really not a good day at the plate. 0-for-4 with 2 Ks and a GIDP in the three hole in front of the best hitter in the AL leaving two runners in scoring position and making the last out of the inning twice, including once against Kyle "The Lobbing Gascan" Lohse, has to be considered one of the Low Water Marks on the batting scale.

Shake it off, Ron. (Consider not batting him third, Eric)

9) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Rafael Perez, Fausto Carmona, and Really Big Bob combined to throw 2 1/3 perfect innings of relief. Wickman's save involved nine pitches, seven for strikes. That's nice.

(*) *I'm not.*